



Roberta Hill Whiteman

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*Groping within us are cries yet unheard. We are
born with cobwebs in our mouths
bleeding with prophecies. Yet within this interior,
a spirit kindles
moonlight glittering deep into the sea. These seeds
take root in the hush
of dusk. Songs, a thin echo, heal the salted marsh,
and yield visions untrembling in our grip.*

— from “Dream of Rebirth”

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Biography

Author and scholar Roberta Hill Whiteman (Oneida) is an enrolled member of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin. She is most widely known for her poetry which may be found in her first two books, *Star Quilt* (1984), and *Philadelphia Flowers* (1996), as well as in numerous anthologies.

Dr. Hill Whiteman holds a BA in creative communication from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, an MA in fine arts from the University of Montana, and a PhD in American Studies from the University of Minnesota. Her doctoral dissertation is a biography that documents the life of Dr. Lillie Rosa Minoka-Hill, Roberta's grandmother. Dr. Minoka-Hill, a member of the New York-based Mohawk tribe, graduated from the former Philadelphia Women's Medical College in 1899, making her the second Native American woman to hold a medical degree in the U.S.

Quick Facts

- * Born in 1951
- * Member of
the Oneida
Nation of
Wisconsin
- * Poet and
academic

This page was researched and
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Roberta Hill Whiteman

Biography continued

As a poet, Hill Whiteman extends her grandmother's example of strength and self-expression. Her poems weave nature into human experience, enhancing the reader's own respect for and identity with nature. Hill Whiteman juxtaposes images into shocking relationships that allow the reader a sense of wholeness in spite of the turmoil that inflicts the poems and life. Her style of relating small things with great ones is one quality of Roberta's work that draws in the reader and connects her/him with the poem's subjects. A 15th Anniversary edition of her first book, *Star Quilt*, is expected to be released in the Fall of 1999.

The tribal and spiritual values that empower her work resonate in her life. Speeches she has given at "Returning the Gift" conferences have been reported as "inspirational" (Tschetter). Hill Whiteman's ability to translate her spirituality and her Oneida Indian heritage (not mutually exclusive) is a gift in every form she gives it. In 1992, Roberta Hill Whiteman was instrumental in the collaboration necessary for the creation of what would be the St. Paul, Minnesota Sculpture Garden, Language of the Land Project. The display, located in Minnehaha Park, presents Native American historical, cultural, and aesthetic viewpoints (Dunn). The Saint Paul Cultural Garden Web Page reports that the "site-lines and text of Roberta Hill Whiteman's room . . . are developed with reference to the Native American burial grounds that are visible from the site" (Language of the Land Project).

Dr. Hill Whiteman is the 1991 winner of the Wisconsin Idea Foundation's Excellence Award. She is an Associate Professor of English and American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. And she is the mother of three: Jacob, Heather, and Melissa.





Roberta Hill Whiteman

Selected Bibliography

Works by the author

Star Quilt (1984).

Philadelphia Flowers (1996).

Works about the author

Dunn, Ann M. "Taoyateduta Mask Dedication a Symbol of Reconciliation" (*The Circle*, 1995).

"Language of the Land Project: Minnesota Language of the Land Sampler" (Minnesota Center for the Book, 1996).

Tschetter, Ann. "'Returning the Gift' to Native community" (*News from Indian Country*, 1995).